



## TECHNICAL ARCHITECTURE STATUS REPORT: OPEN OFFICE PILOT

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June 24, 2008

### Introduction

The Department of Workforce Services (DWS) agreed to do a pilot study on the use of Open Office (Novell Edition) in a specific DWS workgroup consisting primarily of casual Microsoft Office Users. The pilot group focused most of their attention on the Open Office Write application and did only minimal testing with Calc and Presentation. The group is representative of many State users that are incidental or casual users of Microsoft Office applications.

### Pilot Characteristics and Limitations

The pilot sample did not include many "power" users, but a few were used to using many of the features of MS Word. The group was instructed to use only Open Office, and MS Word was installed in only one instance where the user had a business need that required MS Word, particularly the use of MS Word templates from other agencies. The group did not make any extensive use of Presentation or Calc documents, so the data for comparison is limited for these applications. This group also tended to make fairly extensive use of existing MS Word forms and prepared many of their own mailings using the mail merge features that were familiar to them in MS Word. The group tested Open Office from March to date. A number of the issues that the group discussed were somewhat anecdotal, and the test group is gathering additional examples of issues that have the potential to cause some level of reduced productivity,

### Summary of Results

The pilot group reported the following observations with near unanimous concurrence:

- Write is adequate for most common word processing activities and meets basic user requirements for a word processing platform.
- The largest problems encountered by users were related to consuming forms designed in earlier versions of MS Word and some specialty formats in other documents. The group provided a number of examples which will be sent to Novell for resolution.

- The pilot group uniformly recommended the need for some additional training. While the interface is similar, Open Office has some features not available in MS Word. Training needs to be focused on functionality and benefits.
- With 21 different versions of MS Office in use in State government, it is not surprising that forms in particular posed the largest issues in using the Write application. It begs the question of the appropriateness of forms use in a Word processing format, irrespective of platform.
- Mail merge in Write was not as intuitive to use as mail merge in MS Word. This needs to be brought to Novell's attention. There is some question as to how generally that requirement is used across a broader sampling of State employees.
- The pilot group will continue to test Open Office and provide more specific examples of formatting and conversion issues that can be referred to Novell for resolution.
- When Open Office is installed, agencies need to be sure that default document formats are set to MS Office 1997-2003. Some pilot users saved in native .odx formats and had difficulty interchanging documents.

#### Conclusion and Next Steps

The initial pilot study did not provide any evidence that Open Office Write was not an acceptable word processing platform.

The specific issues reported by the group need to be addressed with Novell for possible resolution. The pilot study should be expanded to gather additional test data on Calc and Presentation, and to validate experience with Write.

From an overall policy perspective, the group was encouraged to go back to Word if the use of Open Office impeded productivity. Only one user opted to shift back to MS Word. That user was a heavy consumer of forms and templates from non DWS agencies.

Addressing the issue of a common forms standard platform format is an issue that may need to be addressed. Other than that requirement for some standardization, it is recommended that a Phase 2 pilot study move forward to validate Write experience and gather new information on Calc and Presentation.

It is probable that the State may be able to establish an MS Office or Open Office policy and attain substantial savings for a large percentage of basic users.